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Is the Damage Already Done?:

Effect on the Black Community's Psyche Caused by Viral Police Shootings

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Is the Damage Already Done?:

Effect on the Black Community's Psyche Caused by Viral Police Shootings

by

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Report

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family who has always loved, encouraged and supported me. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this to each family that has been a victim to police brutality and social injustice.

Is the Damage Already Done?:

Effect on the Black Community's Psyche Caused by Viral Police Shootings

by

Destinee Chanté Harrison, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

SUPERVISOR: Renita Coleman

With the rise and popularity of personable technology, more and more instances of African Americans being fatally shot by police are circulating the world wide internet. In an effort to bring attention to its injustices, thousands to millions of people share these images via social media. This project is an attempt to understand the lasting psychological affects these viral videos can have on the black community. Additionally, it will outline the underlying causes for the disconnect between officers and the black communities the police.

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It's shortly after midnight New Year's Eve 2017. As usual, my family and I attend Watch Night Service at our local church to bring in the New Year. And every year, we go straight home; enjoy a bottle of sparking apple cider, then off to bed. But this year was a little different. My parents, who are both retired Army, live in Korea and do not get to return to the states very often, so we decided to spend the holidays in Georgia.

My brother and his girlfriend were coming to join us, so we needed to rent a large SUV. So like every New Years Eve, we cleaned the house from top to bottom, washed all the clothes, and went down the list of family New Year Eve traditions. We then headed off to church for what was to be a beautiful service.

For the black community, New Years Eve Watch Night services have important historical meaning.

On Sept. 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation deeming all slaves in the rebelling states free. This proclamation however would not go into effect until Jan. 1, 1863. So as the clock neared midnight, thousands of black slaves sat in churches, the only place black people could collect in masses, and they waited eagerly to be free.

As we sat and followed the narrative of our ancestors' traditions 256 years later, a sense of pride and joy swept through the church.

Right after service, my family and I headed home to enjoy our sparking apple cider, only to see bright flashing blue and red lights behind us, less than a mile from our destination.

Panic quickly set in.

Before we even knew why were being pulled over, my sister and brother immediately pulled out their cellphones and began recording. As the officer advanced, I became extremely fearful for my life. He approached the front window and extended his flashlight so that he could see everyone in the car.

At this moment, you could literally see the uneasiness in everyone's eyes. Then another police car pulls up. The second officer approaches the car. Though this encounter may have lasted only five minutes, it was the longest five minutes of my life. I did not want to be the next hashtag.

My father's only infraction was not turning on the headlights for a rental car with which he was unfamiliar. The officers were very kind and we all made it home safely. It was ironic that on a night when we were celebrating the New Year and reminiscing about our ancestor's freedom, we all felt our freedom, in fact our lives were in jeopardy all these years later. I was afraid. But, why was I so afraid? I had never had a negative encounter with police before. I then quickly realized it was the videos. The constant viral streaming

of videos showing the ultimate demise for people that look like me had taken its toll on me and what I expected, in fact, what I feared would happened to my family and I. Unlike our encounter, those people's stories did not have pleasant endings.

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The first instance of televised police brutality post Civil Rights was the beating of Rodney King in 1991[1]. The Los Angeles taxi driver was viciously beaten on camera by four white police officers, who were later exonerated of all charges. The video was constantly played on every major network, and caused uproar throughout the city. For that generation it was an unfortunate case that brought race relations and police brutality to the forefront of conversations.

Twenty years later on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida, those conversations were yet again brought to the forefront when George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager. Zimmerman, like the LAPD officers in the Rodney King case, was acquitted of all charges based on Florida's controversial "Stand Your Ground" law. According to a Florida law passed in 2016[2], "a person is justified in using or threatening to use deadly force if he or she reasonably believes that using or threatening to use such force is necessary to prevent imminent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another

[1] Race & Policing: The Legacy of Rodney King. (n.d.) Retrieved Februatry 8, 2017, from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/lapd/race/king.html

[2] Justifiable Use of Force, §§ 776-776.012-776.09 (2016).

or to prevent the imminent commission of a forcible felony." However, in recent homicide cases involving unarmed black men, vigilante civilians or civilians fearing for their lives are not the accused; police officers are the alleged perpetrators.

With the sudden onset of killings being caught on tape and shared across multiple social media networking sites, the black community is affected by its overwhelming presence. Similar to emotions exhibited after the 9/11 attacks[3], people in the black community have experienced symptoms of PTSD in relation to viral police shooting videos. Scholars and civilians have said that these images are damning to the black psyche; for those that are directly involved as victims and for those that are indirectly involved as onlookers.

Locha Brooks is a single mother of two boys and a schoolteacher in St. Louis, MO. In February 2013, while pregnant with her youngest son, Brooks' then-husband, Charles A. Brooks, was arrested for marijuana possession. In light of the arrest and because of the police department's crack down on illegal drugs, the arresting officer received a citation for "Outstanding Police Work." Six months later, on August 9th 2014, that same officer, Darren Wilson, shot and killed an 18-year-old unarmed black man in Ferguson, MO: that man was Michael Brown.

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[3] Neria, Y., DiGrande, L., & Adams, B. G. (n.d.). Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Following the September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attacks [Abstract]. *American Psychologist,66*(6), 429-446. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0024791

Brooks recalls, “I was just leaving my grandmother’s house when I saw a lot of people on Facebook saying that a black boy was shot by a police officer on West Florissant. I took my boys to the skating rink and we were there for a while, maybe three hours,” said Brooks. “I normally don’t listen to the radio, but that night, for some reason, on our way home, the CD stopped working. When I went to the radio the lady was saying ‘this is just outrageous, this body is still in the middle of the street’.”

That evening the city erupted and set a course for a new civil rights movement.

The Michael Brown case took social media by storm. In the outlying St. Louis suburb, after reportedly robbing a convenience store, Brown was returning home with a friend when Officer Wilson approached him. A scuffle erupted. Hours later the scene was flooded with police officers, news crews, and protestors as Brown’s body lay lifeless in the street.

“As time went on I was actively avoiding anything to do with the case, because I don’t like confrontation, but later, my husband at the time called me to tell me that the officer who shot Mike Brown was the same officer he was suppose to go to court with next month. I was so shocked. What this led me to believe was that this could have been him,” said Brooks.

"I went to Greater Grace (a nearby church), because I felt it was neutral ground, but there were some white people from out of town, shouting, 'you people should be angry. Hell, hell, guilty as hell. The whole system is guilty as hell.' They started this chant with profane language outside of the church, then got all these black folks roused up."

Who is affected by the mass production of police killing videos?

Since Brown's death numerous videos have surfaced on social media of unarmed black men being gunned down by police. The constant replaying of these images has begun to take a negative toll on the black community according to Houston psychiatrist Dr. Dyaz Godfrey.

Godfrey has been practicing for 18 years and has looked at these issues and believes that the long-term effect of their repetitive consumption has already done serious lasting damage.

"When you have someone not filtering the information that comes in and they embrace it, they absorb it like a sponge. So even if these videos were to stop tomorrow, they would already have these images in their mind," said Godfrey.

"These videos have already done significant damage. The black community has already been conditioned to think this is the status quo."

In 2015 The Guardian, a British daily newspaper began keeping records of people who were victims of police killings in the United States. Prior to this, federal officials relied solely on local and state police to report shootings involving officers, but those reports were voluntary and if filed, classified as "justifiable homicides."[4]

After their initial data was released, following the death of Michael Brown, the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigations, James Comey, released a statement noting how "embarrassing and unacceptable" it was that the newspaper had better data on police violence than the F.B.I.

As a result, former U.S. attorney general Loretta Lynch announced the development of a new program that accounts for these deadly encounters between police and civilians.

At the conclusion of 2015[5], The Guardian reported that police killed 1,146 people, of which 234 were unarmed. At the end of their 2016 report, their data stated that 1,092

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[4] Tran, M. (2015, October 8). FBI chief: 'unacceptable' that Guardian has better data on police violence. *The Guardian*. Retrieved February 8, 2017, from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/oct/08/fbi-chief-says-ridiculous-guardian-washington-post-better-information-police-shootings

[5] The Counted: People Killed by Police in the United States [Advertisement]. (2016, January 1). Retrieved February 8, 2017, from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database

people were killed, 169 of them were unarmed. Of the 395 victims of police shooting, 121 were black.

With numerous videos floating through the Internet of these incidents, the black community has begun taking their concerns to officers.

Xavier Durham, 21, is a junior at The University of Texas at Austin who feels his biracial status has prevented him from having to deal with direct racism; however, he believes because he is half black, he needs to protect himself from the police.

"There was a recent protest on January 20TH to march against the inauguration of Donald Trump and I decided to leave a little early," said Durham. "As I was walking off, I was recording myself because I would be walking by a few cops, just to make sure that I had a full documentation of what I was doing; that way if anything went south, I would have full video of what actually happened."

Though nothing happened to Durham that day, his perception of how police deal with black males forced him to take extra precautions.

Prior to this, Durham admits to never having had contact with police officers. However, due to the constant consumption, via social media, of seeing police shootings, Durham says he has developed a "paranoia" surrounding the intentions of officers.

“I started being cautious of police my freshman year around the time Mike Brown was shot,” said Durham. “Just basically seeing all these stories, and even going more recent with cases like Philando Castillo and knowing that even with video documentation, that may not even be enough; so I started developing this paranoia around police and I am just uncomfortable even when I walk by them, despite me not doing anything wrong.”

Michael Trujillo, a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University, is conducting a study on why people have reactions similar to Durham. Trujillo believes what Durham and many others are experiencing is “vicarious racism.”

“Vicarious racism is essentially when you have a friend or a family member who is recounting a distressing experience where they were the subject of discrimination, and you begin to exhibit some of those same responses as the person who was the recipient of the discrimination,” said Trujillo.

“With the news media around, these videos get a ton of circulation on TV, Facebook and other social media platforms. It’s possible, even though we the public are not the direct recipients of that discrimination or that experience, we live vicariously through [it] and it makes us more likely to engage in the same type of experience of that stressor,” said Trujillo.

With the death of Michael Brown totally consuming St. Louis news stations and social media, Brooks tried to shelter her sons from witnessing the chaos that was happening just a few miles from their home. However, it was met with little success.

“I am very particular about what I have on the TV in my home for my kids to watch and be influenced by. I cannot control everything they see, so as the months went on and more information came out, he had more questions,” said Brooks of her 8-year-old son.

“I believe they had talked about it in school, he came home saying things like ‘they just had him in the middle of the street, and he ain’t do nothing, he had his hands up.’ And then I knew they were talking about it in school, because that was one of the major things. At that point I knew I had to address it.”

Brooks’ youngest son, now 3, has also begun showing signs of vicarious racism.

“During last summer, my son’s uncle had died of natural causes. However, my three-year-old came to me and said ‘you know the police shot Uncle Kevin.’ That was totally mind blowing that he would assume something like this. Nobody told him that, but by being a product of this environment, to where you are consistently hearing about this in the media, is where he got this from. This was the norm to him. For him, this is how black men die.”

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11 many researchers began studying what kind of effects those images had on the American people. Their findings suggested that within 5 years of the attacks, the number of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder cases across the U.S. rose 19 percent[6]. Even those not directly affected by the attack felt some trauma associated with images of the day's events.

While the 9/11 attacks and the death of young black men are different, Godfrey has found social media videos of these incidents to have the same effect on black psychology.

"It's separate and it's similar, because even though it is still PTSD, people come together when something happens nationally, but when you talk about something that is isolated to a certain part of the human race, then it's a little different," said Godfry.

On July 5 2016, Alton Sterling, a Baton Rouge, LA, native, was shot and killed by police officers after being stopped for selling CDs outside of a convenience store. Within minutes, video of his death swarmed social media. The next day, in Falcon Heights, MN, Diamond Reynolds, recorded her boyfriend, Philando Castile, on Facebook Live as he bled to death after being shot while seated in a car. Within 24 hours, the video was viewed 3.2 million times.

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[6] Brackbill, R. M., Hadler, J. L., DiGrande, L., Ekenga, C. C., Farfel, M. R., Friedman, S., . . . Thorpe, L. E. (2009, August 05). Asthma and posttraumatic stress symptoms 5 to 6 years following exposure to the World Trade Center terrorist attack. Retrieved February 15, 2017, from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19654385

To study exactly how social media videos, in particular, affect black and white psychology, VCU's Robertson School of Media and Culture, and the school's Psychology Department have recently teamed up to conduct research on the matter.

Dr. Karen McIntyre is an assistant professor of multimedia journalism at VCU and alongside Trujillo and Dr. Paul Perrin, associate professor in counseling and health psychology at VCU, has begun to prep a team of Ph.D. and undergraduate students on how to read and monitor the physiological responses participants have when watching police killings.

The study uses video footage from Facebook on the death of Linwood "Ray" Lambert, a 46-year-old black man, who was tased to death by a white officer in South Boston, VA, on May 4, 2013. Researchers in this study use psychophysiology measures to calculate how black and white students cope with the images and comments. Each subject is connected to electrode sensors on their face, arms and hands that measure heart rate, skin conductance or sweat, and facial muscle movements, all which indicate how people are feeling towards the videos and comments.

While training students on how to work and test the equipment, McIntyre says she has already noticed some alarming results.

"We have hooked students up (to the monitors) and had them watch the video several times," said McIntyre. "It is pretty alarming to see such a huge change in the eco-physiological reactions in terms of the negative emotions skyrocketing and the positive emotions are flat."

Why are black people the largest target of police brutality?

In the two years that The Guardian has been collecting data on police killings, African Americans have been among the highest demographics when it comes to victims of police shootings.

In 2016[7], data shows that 52 percent of victims were white, compared to the 24 percent of African Americans, however when compared to the make-up of the U.S. population, African Americans are killed at a higher rate than other demographics.

According to the most recent census data[8], Caucasians make up roughly 77 percent of the population with 52 percent being victims of police shootings. In contrast, African Americans make up 13 percent of the U.S. population, with 24 percent of that community

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[7] The Counted: People Killed by Police in the United States [Advertisement]. (2016, January 1). Retrieved February 8, 2017, from https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database

[8] Population estimates, July 1, 2016, (V2016). (n.d.). Retrieved April 29, 2017, from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00

having been victims of police homicides. This means that black people are twice as likely to be fatally shot by an officer.

"It's fear," said Godfrey. "Think about it, anytime you see black-on-black crime, these officers are thinking, 'if they can kill their own, they don't give a damn about me, therefore, I need to be on guard.' When you see that, you associate it with that community. People outside (the black community), they have a fear, because they can't read you, they don't know where you are coming from. If people in your community can do that, then you are not mentally 'all there'."

More often than not, when questioned about why these officers opted to use lethal force, most respond with, "I was afraid for my life." In the case of 40-year-old Terence Crutcher, Tulsa police Officer Betty Shelby fired one fatal shot. In her initial response to homicide detectives as to why she fired her weapon instead of using her Taser, Shelby replied that she feared for her life and thought Crutcher "was going to kill her."

This common stereotype of black men as violent and dangerous has plagued officers and community relations for years. These perceptions go back to the days prior to the Civil War.

In Ava DuVernay's documentary *13th*, she investigated the source of the violent and dangerous stereotype of black criminality[9]. In her film, DeVernay discovers that the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is used as a "loophole" to keep black people as slaves by identifying them as criminals. Prior to the Civil War, black labor was the backbone of Southern economics. When the slaves were freed, the South lost its free labor and exploited the loophole in the 13th amendment to reintroduce freed slaves back into free labor. The 13th amendment reads:

> Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

According to DuVernay's documentary, after the Civil War, African Americans were incarcerated at an alarming rate, and the modern day perception of black men as criminals developed.

Jelani Cobb, a journalism professor at Columbia University and an award-winning reporter, was featured in the DuVernay's film for his expertise on post-Civil war African American history. In a phone interview Cobb notes how this era is responsible for the development of the modern day perception and criminalization of African Americans.

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[9] DuVernay, A. (Director/Producer), & Averick, S., & Barish, H. (Producers). (2016) October 7). *13th* [Motion picture]. US.

"After the Civil War the Southern labor force was depleted and emancipated and people had to find a new way to replenish that labor force and one of the primary ways they found to do that was by creating a parallel institution to slavery which was the incarcerations system," said Cobb.

The 13th also references *Birth of a Nation*[10], a 1915 film that is known for its violent and animalistic depiction of African American males. These images, stereotypes and portrayals of black culture have been passed down through generations.

"There was a movement that started at the beginning of the 20th century to kind of reassert white supremacy and the belief that the population demographics are changing, that white people are about to become a minority, that the institutions that they have relied upon to produce white supremacy have fallen and they have to reassert themselves, and the film *Birth of a Nation* is sort of a cry or call to arms for white men to do those same things," said Cobb.

"If you look at Dylann Roof, what he was saying after he killed those people in the church (in Charleston, NC, 2015), was not that different from what people were saying in the 19th and 20th century."

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[10] Griffith, D. W. (Director). (1915). *Birth Of A Nation* [Motion picture]. US.

In 2000, Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki, both university communications professors, argued in their book, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*[11], that in very segregated cities, like Ferguson, what white Americans learn about black Americans is not through personal interactions, but rather through how they are portrayed in the media.

A year after the death of Trayvon Martin, a Reuter's poll found that 40 percent of white Americans and 25 percent of minorities only associate with friends of their own race[12].

Gary McFadden, star of Investigation Discovery's show titled, *I Am Homicide*, is a retired homicide detective from Charlotte, NC. During his 38 years of service, he has come to realize that it is not just one or the other, but both sides, black and white, that are responsible for the dismay in America.

"What police enforcement and law enforcement, and district attorney's offices don't want to do well, is justify why they are not going to prosecute an officer for shooting somebody. I think we can all do better," said McFadden.

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11 Entman, R. M., & Rojecki, A. (2007). *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America,*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.

12 Dunsmuir, L. (2013, August 8). Many Americans have no friends of another race: poll. *Reuters*. Retrieved February 21, 2017, from http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-poll-race-idUSBRE97704320130808

“But check this out. Cops look at hip hop videos too. Cops look at media too. We all know about WordStarHipHop. When you have a video of a guy senselessly beating another man, we see that. They see these images and they are engrained in their minds. Same way that young African Americans see videos of police shootings.”

McFadden believes that he lives in three worlds: the law enforcement community, the black community, and the black law enforcement community. That gives him a unique understanding of all parties involved.

“People don’t understand what we go through (as black officers),” said McFadden. “Do you know people called me during the riots and asked me what side I’m going to take?”

McFadden is often asked to speak in black communities to teach people how to act when confronted by police officers. Despite his knowledge, McFadden said communities don’t like hearing from law enforcement, especially black officers.

“When I go to speak at events, I purposely tell (the moderator) to leave out that I am in law enforcement, and then about 15 minutes in, I have the person come back on stage and say ‘he is a 37-year-veteran of law enforcement’,” said McFadden. “When they (the moderators) walk off the stage, the body language and looks from the audience all change. They start rolling their eyes, whispering to each other, folding their arms, only because they said he is a law enforcement officer.”

Despite these reactions, McFadden still has a passion for bridging gaps between black communities and local police departments.

In January 2017, a Pew Research Center[13] study found that since police homicide videos have surfaced across the web, 86 percent of officers say it has made policing much more difficult; 75 percent of officers have become so concerned with their safety that they are less likely to use appropriate force when necessary or stop suspicious people altogether.

In January 2015, McFadden and convicted felon Shaun Corbett developed "Cops and Barbers" as a way to get black communities in touch with police officers and to start conversations about the issues surrounding the communities and police relations.

"Initially, it didn't take off well because it made communities and law enforcement both be accountable for what they do," said McFadden. "Me and Shaun started these community meetings all over the community and we just give people something they never had before. We gave them a platform to speak."

McFadden believes that this program can help mend the community and police relations.

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13 Morin, R., Parker, K., Stepler, R., & Mercer, A. (2017, January 10). Behind the Badge. Retrieved February 21, 2017, from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/

"The greatest debates in the African American communities are done at salons and barbershops. So we have officers who are driving through the neighborhoods just stop, get out of their cars, go into that all-black barbershop as a white officer, sit down on the bench and have a conversation," said McFadden. "And guess what, officers go back, just to have that continuous conversation."

In another Pew study in 2016[14], researchers discovered that when it comes to positive perspectives of local police departments, whites are twice as likely as blacks to think that each department uses the right amount of force and treats different racial groups equally. McFadden has made it his life's mission to mend these disconnected communities.

Prior to the death of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, LA, McFadden spoke with the local police department, district attorney's office, and the sheriff's department, alongside members of their black community, to talk about the failing relationship between the two groups, and how to mend that relationship. The conversation ended with all three departments denying having any problems with the black community. Within a few weeks, video footage of officers pinning and shooting Sterling flooded social media.

[14] Morin, R., & Stepler, R. (2016, September 29). The Racial Confidence Gap in Police Performance. Retrieved April 29, 2017, from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/09/29/the-racial-confidence-gap-in-police-performance/

“Here is a young man standing on the street corner for two years. Two years, standing on the street corner selling CDs. Nobody in law enforcement had a relationship with a guy standing on a street corner for two years. What is wrong with that picture,” said McFadden. “We tell law enforcement, ‘yes, you can be a warrior, but you also need to be an activist in your community. Let people know that you are human’.”

In 2011, McFadden started Simply McFadden Solutions, LLC, a consulting firm that helps clients with risk assessments, security, logistics, and investigative consulting. Often, McFadden will dedicate his services as a “law enforcement community advocate” to local police departments to help mend police-community relations. Due to his lengthy and successful career in law enforcement, McFadden can pinpoint departments that need his help.

“I have a one-question test for every police chief I speak to,” said McFadden. “You can take all the classes, you can have your Ph.D., you can go to F.B.I. School, but I say, if you answer this one question correctly, I will walk away and you don’t need my services. Then I say, ‘tell me the difference between cornrows, plaits, dreads, twisties, and dreadlocks’.”

Though this question may seem comical, McFadden believes a police chief who knows the difference between these hairstyles, has a better understanding of the black community.

"Here is why. Let's say there are two black men walking down the street on opposite sides of the road. Each goes to the gas station on his respective side and leaves to return home. But let's say that one of the men got angry, spit on the clerk, assaulted him and walked out. Now the description we hear on the dispatch is 'African American male, approximately six feet, wearing a hoodie, headed south-bound on such-and-such street. Well the dispatch didn't know the difference between common black hairstyles and couldn't say that the suspect has dreads, so the first person the officer stops has nothing to do with the incident, but is now angry and seeming to resist arrest because he has done nothing wrong."

How to heal?

As more and more videos of these instances are being broadcast across social media, an ethical and moral debate arises. Ethically, is sharing viral violent videos the right thing to do? Morally, what does our own internal compass tell us about the sharing of these videos and what is our response? Whether conflicted ethically or morally, research on the psychological effects of police shooting videos is still in the early stages. Health researchers and psychologists like Godfrey agree that the constant resurfacing and replaying of these images can be extremely damaging to the black psychology. However, there is a debate within these communities on whether or not it is important to watch, or best to look away.

While these are stories that need to be told to start conversations and construct change in a very race- and class-driven society, publicizing the horrors of someone's last moments can be difficult morally.

"It's important that we are having these conversations," says Trujillo, the VCU doctoral student.

"The more these videos circulate, hopefully, the segment of the population that kind of denies that this happens can't hide from it. I know that there are people who are very adamant about sharing those types of videos and I would image it's because they want to make sure people understand that these incidents are not isolated."

On the other hand, the University of Texas-Austin junior Xavier Durham says he does not repost these videos, but for his own mental health feels better after having conversations with like-minded people. Similarly, after living just streets down from where the Michael Brown incident occurred, Brooks and her colleagues got together to have a round-table conversation.

"During that time, about 100 teachers participated in a school-wide cultural competence seminar because of all of the tension in the community and what was going on in Ferguson," said Brooks. "About a quarter of the teachers are black and the rest of the

teachers were either white or other ethnicities, but what it did was start conversations with teachers who wouldn't otherwise converse outside of their department. The dialogue was very healthy, it was very good, and it needed to be had."

From this, Brooks and a fellow teacher, Dr. Kevin Murray teamed up to develop S.T.O.R.I.E.D (Students Taking On Race and Identify Through Empowered Discussion), a program for students to congregate and have similar conversations.

"We believed that students would benefit from structured conversations like these. We felt that if we gave students this platform, when they become of age, or our age, they may be police officers, they may be judges, lawyers, they may be owners of business, and they will already have had these race conversations. There will not be so much tension," said Brooks.

Perhaps tension is the catalyst that exists for both potential victims and alleged perpetrators of incidents leading to viral violent videos. Whatever the cause, many agree that the result is a deeply rooted damage to the black psyche. All the moral and ethical dilemmas that exist when deciding to air or view viral videos are unclear; however, what is transparent is the harm they have done to communities. Godfrey says the damage to the black psyche may be irreversible; we must remember that so is the decision to pull the trigger.

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